

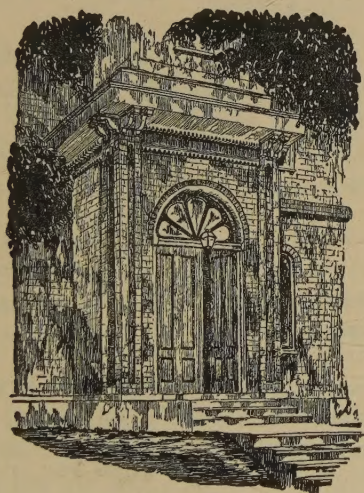
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Bangor Theological Seminary



The Authority of the Bible

Burton H. Throckmorton, Jr.

Convocation Week—50th Anniversary *Frederick W. Whittaker*

Seminary Opens For 139th Year

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Alumni Notes

LETTER TO THE ALUMNI

Dear Fellow Alumnus:

The best way to sustain interest in Bangor Seminary is to keep people talking about it. And the best way to keep people talking about it is to get them together where they will talk.

I have had a conviction for a long time that the Bangor Seminary Alumni group could be strengthened if we had more talking groups—smaller informal Alumni groups regionally organized. The only active group we have now besides the general Alumni Association is the Boston-Bangor Alumni Association. That has remained quite strong for a long time and is a good fellowship. I cherish its meetings as much as anything I attend.

It seems to me that there must be sufficient concentrations of Bangor graduates in some areas to warrant their getting together once or twice a year just for old time's sake and the good of the Seminary. My guess is that there are enough men around Pittsfield, Massachusetts, or Portland, Maine, or Bangor itself, to make for lively groups.

When we were in the Connecticut Valley we had such a group. Husbands and wives and sometimes children got together a couple of times a year in the home of an alumnus, usually with a member of the faculty present. I am sure it helped to sustain our interest in Bangor.

If somebody should take the initiative and offer to get the men, and maybe their wives, in his area together to get a group started we would be willing to help all we can, with suggestions, lists, etc. The Seminary is really moving forward wonderfully. I am sure we can help it if we will get together, talk about it, and offer whatever help we can.

Faternally yours,

CLARENCE W. FULLER, '37, *President*
Alumni Association

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The Alumni Bulletin

Of Bangor Theological Seminary

MERVIN M. DEEMS. *Editor*

Volume XXIX

OCTOBER, 1954

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THE AUTHORITY OF THE BIBLE

By BURTON H. THROCKMORTON, JR.

(Graduate of the University of Virginia, Union Theological Seminary and Columbia University, Dr. Throckmorton has taught at New York University, Union Theological Seminary, Drew Theological Seminary, Princeton University and Wellesley College. He succeeds the late Dr. Alfred Morris Perry as Professor of New Testament Language and Literature, and delivered this address at the opening service of the school year.)

Failure to articulate points of view with regard to the authority of scripture is largely responsible for the chasm which unfortunately exists today between the Biblical critic and the theologian, and is responsible for the consequent uncertainty in the minds of both preachers and laymen with regard to scripture. Good expository preaching is not common and is often haltingly uttered, and the Bible is infrequently read by the average Christian largely because neither preacher nor layman feels quite sure that he knows how to read the Bible and apply it in good conscience. This problem does not exist, of course, for the rigid biblicist, one of whom, thinking he had settled all questions, said to me, "I'd rather believe God than a professor,"—as though he and I differed on that point. But great masses of Christians, who are not rigid biblicists and feel they cannot be, have been left without a norm since the

advent of historical criticism. They are not able to articulate in what sense the Bible can be authoritative for them.

Furthermore, scholars have not been of much assistance. By and large neither the Biblical critic nor the theologian has raised the question as to the sense in which scripture is authoritative; and this question is not one which is best left unmentioned. On the contrary, the time has come when it must be raised, and must be discussed, and to it we now turn.

I

Before we speak of the Bible at all, we must remember that the Christian's final and absolute authority is God as He is revealed in Jesus Christ. No statement regarding the authority of scripture can be allowed in any way to contradict this. The authority of the Bible must be related to the authority of God in Christ.

Two questions now face us. First: Is the Bible authoritative? Second: If it is, in what sense is it authoritative? These two questions are closely related to each other, and the answer given to each depends to a degree upon the answer given to the other. It is not only true that the sense in which the Bible is authoritative cannot be determined until the question of whether the Bible is authoritative at all is answered; but it is also true that the answer to the question as to whether the Bible is authoritative depends upon the meaning given to the word "authoritative," that is, upon the sense in which the question is asked. While, then, the answer to each question depends in part upon the answer given to the other, clarity requires us to deal with the questions successively. Let us turn then to the first question. Is the Bible authoritative? That is to say, does it in any respect say the last word to the Christian? Is the Bible uniquely authoritative in the sense that it is *finally* normative, that it judges all and is judged by none? There are many powers in the world, and there are many faiths declared to be true. The question is not, Does the Bible contain some truth, some measure of authority, for none could deny that it does. The question rather is, Is the Bible absolutely and finally authoritative, and normative for all other authority? To answer this question let us begin by turning our memories back to the first decades and centuries of the Christian Church, when the New Testament Canon was being formulated.

II

The first Christians—the first men who believed that Jesus had been raised from the dead and who called him Lord—were Jews, for whom the Old Testament constituted the oracles of God. For Jews of the first century it was "an uncontested axiom that every syllable of Scripture" (that is, the Old Testament) "had the verity and

authority of the word of God."¹ Every word of scripture was believed to be of divine origin and authority having been communicated by God either directly (as in Moses' case) or through dreams and visions, or through the inspiration of the spirit. And the early Christians ascribed no less authority to the Old Testament than did the Jews. More than that, it was the Old Testament which supplied the Christians with proof of their claims with regard to Christ. The Old Testament was in the early Church quite literally the word of God, inspired in all its parts, containing no errors and no contradictions. The Old Testament Canon had, for the most part, been set; and was not to be enlarged, especially by books which were known to have been written since the days of the last prophets following whom the spirit was believed to have departed from Israel.

But the first Christians had, in addition to their Old Testament scriptures, the words of their Lord Jesus; and their minds were bursting with memories of him who had taught them with authority, who had so recently suffered many things, whom they had forsaken, who had been crucified and who miraculously had appeared to them on the third day. His words were as authoritative as the words of Moses and of the prophets. The spirit which had departed with the prophets had returned to Jesus at his baptism so that he had spoken with an authority equal to theirs. More than that, the Holy Spirit had descended upon the Christians as Joel had foretold would occur in the last days. Their message was that the promises of the Old Testament whose fulfilling had been long awaited in Israel, were now accomplished. Jesus, who had been crucified, was the Messiah. What he had said, what he had done, what had happened to him, was the completion of God's revelation of Himself and of His purpose for man. None of this

1. George Foot Moore, *Judaism*. Vol. I, p. 239.

had been accidental—not even the crucifixion; it was all of it the end toward which the Old Testament pointed. All could share in this fulfillment if they would but “repent and be baptized . . . in the name of Jesus Christ” (Acts 2:38).

Quite naturally and unconsciously, the fulfillment of the Old Testament scriptures was preached together with the promises of those scriptures. The promises could not any longer be preached alone; indeed, the emphasis could not even lie on them. The emphasis must now lie on the fulfillment, with the promises preached in order that *what* was fulfilled might be understood.

From the moment, then, at which Jesus was first preached as Messiah, as the fulfillment of Old Testament expectations, an addition has been made to Old Testament authority. The Old Testament, to those who received Jesus as Messiah, no longer comprised the whole of God's revelation to Israel. The revelation had now been extended in the revealing of its climax. There was as yet no new Canon—nothing had been written down. But there was already the antecedent of a Canon—the words of the Messiah, the story about him, and the understanding which was being formulated of precisely what God had said and done “in these last days.” And while all this was in oral form, it was no less authoritative. Jesus' words were repeated, not simply as words of an honored teacher, but as words of the Messiah. His acts were likewise remembered as acts which had been performed by the Messiah. And still more important—but so very hard to penetrate—the *meaning* of it all, what God had said in and through His Messiah, must be proclaimed! Those who had witnessed and accepted Jesus as Messiah formed a new community, the Church. This was a preaching community. Christ had not commanded the apostles to write, but to preach; and what we know as the Church would have died with the first disciples had not this

message been preached. As St. Paul wrote to the Romans, “How are men to call upon him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher?” (Rom. 10:14) Of course they could not! And so the preaching of the gospel led to the extension of the community. Where the gospel was preached, there the Church sprang up. Could the Church exist without this message? Quite clearly, No. Once the revelation had been given and responded to, the Church came into being; and it was when this revelation was preached that the community spread, the Church emerging almost over night throughout the Mediterranean world.

It is not our purpose tonight to trace the subsequent history of this *kerygma*, nor the ways in which the response to the revelation was articulated. But the response was written down, the writing representing a transitional stage of the proclamation from an oral to a written form. No new authority accrued to the gospel as a result of this transition. Jesus' words were no more authoritative if read from papyrus than if quoted from memory; and surely St. Paul's letters carried no more weight in the communities to which he wrote than did his oral speech. No; the gospel in written form was simply the means of bridging the gaps of space and time. By this means St. Paul could exert his apostolic authority from one end of the Mediterranean to the other; and from the first century to the twentieth, and on to the end. The New Testament preserves the apostolic gospel and projects this gospel down through the ages until the last day.

Later, when the outside world attacked the Church and, still more serious, when dissensions arose within, the apostles' written word was appealed to as final and authoritative. No influential bishops and no church council decreed this literature to be authorita-

tive. It simply *was*, by virtue of the fact that it had grown out of the Church, that it represented the consensus held by Christ's original apostles, that it was the written account, formulated by the community as a whole, of what God had done in Christ. No one apostle had formulated this gospel; and no one cleric could alter it; nor could the community as a whole. To what other source could the Church have turned? Here was recorded the heart of the message which had founded the Church. Quite naturally Christians quoted from these books without preface or comment, not rendering an independent opinion with regard to them but, as Westcott said, following "an unquestioned judgment."² The mind of the Church as a whole had settled by common usage on a group of writings as authoritative long before any Church councils were held. The Church did not need consciously to decide that she would add a group of writings to the Old Testament; before she knew it she had already done so. To quote Westcott again, "With the exception of the Epistle to the Hebrews, the two shorter Epistles of St. John, the second Epistle of St. Jude, and the Apocalypse"—seven of our twenty-seven New Testament books, and three of which are of little consequence—"all the other books of the New Testament are acknowledged as Apostolic and authoritative throughout the Church at the close of the second century."³ "Slow experience and spiritual instinct decided the practical judgment of the Church . . . Without controversy and without effort 'the Gospel and the Apostles' were recognized as inspired sources of truth in the same sense as 'the Law and the Prophets.'"⁴

As far as the seven books are concerned, they were not universally held as authoritative because they were not universally

known. But we are not here concerned with the third- fourth- and fifth-century question of precisely which books were to make up the New Testament Canon. We wish only to emphasize that the authority of what we might call the heart of our New Testament was never disputed in the early Church. The authority of the message which these books proclaim did not rest with a decision of the Church which might later have been called into question. No, the message witnessed to in these books was the message which had called into being the Christian communities of the Roman empire. For these communities to question the proclamation of faith which they had received in its written form would have been for them to question the witness they were making in the world and to question the new foundation upon which their lives had been set and in devotion to which not a few had sacrificed themselves in the arena. The basic message of the Church, the core of its proclamation, has always been the message proclaimed in the New Testament. The Bible is not only authoritative for the Church; the Church cannot be herself without the Bible. For the Church to question the authority of scripture is not simply for her to question the authority of a document, external to herself, which she may accept or dispose of as she will. Rather she questions her own authority, whether she be of man or of God. For the Church to question the authority of scripture is for her to question the validity of her message and of her historic function in the world. The Church and the Bible are inseparable. Each brought into being and embraced the other; and one without the other would die.

The Bible is and must remain the final authority in the Church; and without the Bible the Church cannot be the Church. The Bible is the stage from which Christ speaks, and from that stage he exerts his authority over his Church. But this authority is not to be considered different in

2. Brooke Foss Westcott, *A General Survey of the History of the Canon of the New Testament*, 3rd edition, p. 12.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 305 f.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 317 f.

kind from the authority which Christ exercised over his disciples in first century Palestine. Then, we are told, he taught as one having authority. What kind of authority? Not that of a demagogue exerted powerfully over his followers to the extent that their freedom became his prerogative. Peter was free to deny, Judas to betray. Then wherein lay Christ's authority? It lay here, that his reference was not to man but to God. He taught and acted by no standard other than the will of God. He was authoritative, then, only over the lives of those who identified the source of his authority and who subjected themselves to the same authority. Christ did not impose his authority over men, to be accepted uncritically, without inner endorsement and apart from a free decision of the will. On the contrary, having proclaimed the will and the judgments and the promises of God, he was delivered over to be crucified. Here was no despot; here was the Lamb of God that was slain.

The authority of the Bible is not different in kind from that exercised by Jesus. It is not tyrannical in character; it does not overrule man's freedom; it is not imposed upon man from the outside to be accepted whether or not it validates itself as true—and any Church which tries such an imposition does not understand wherein the power of the Bible lies. It is rather an authority which must be decided for and accepted in faith as from God. And to deny it is to deny Christ.

III

We have seen that the *kerygma* of the Church, the basic Christian teaching and preaching, was not a matter to be decided by Church assemblies and ecclesiastical councils; but was inherited by the Church from the first disciples and apostles. By the middle of the second century the direction which this message was to take had been established by common usage. Trinitarian and Christological problems were

settled by councils; but in these discussions scripture was assumed to be normative, and even heretics used the Bible to argue their heresies.

While, then, it is true to say that the Christian proclamation was not decided by edicts or councils but by general use, this cannot be said of the Canon. It was inevitable that some books would be known and used in one part of the Church and not in another. And so it was that lists of canonical books which were drawn up in various Christian centers by different Church leaders were not identical. While the center of the message was commonly accepted, the periphery had to be worked out in the third, fourth and fifth centuries. During these years the twenty-seven books which constitute our New Testament, together with the Old Testament, became Canon.

But it would not do to overemphasize the differences in these early lists of books. They were, in fact, strikingly similar. As Westcott has written: "Briefly it may be said that wherever the East and the West entered into a true union" (for example, at Alexandria and Caesarea) "there the Canon is found perfect; while the absence or incompleteness of this union is the measure of the corresponding defects in the Canon."⁵ Only the Apocalypse was a subject of much controversy, and that largely because of the misuse made of it by the Montanists.

The Counciliar Canons wrought no new work; the Canon had in fact already come into being without any authoritative decision behind it. The Canon of Eusebius was much like our own, although Eusebius was not quite sure whether the Apocalypse should be included. Later Athanasius issued a list of authoritative books which included the Apocalypse and was in all other respects like that of Eusebius, and the question of the Canon was practically settled.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 364.

When St. Jerome and St. Augustine independently supported the same Canon, and the list of Pope Gelasius confirmed the books of the New Testament which we now receive to be canonical, the New Testament was fixed.

The Canon was, then, a matter of some dispute, as the basic gospel message was not. And the question arises, in discussing the authority of the Bible, as to whether it is the Canon which is to be authoritative, or a part of the Canon; and if a part, then what part? There have been those who have accepted the authority of parts of the Canon while rejecting the authority of the whole. Some books have been held to contain the gospel in its purest form, while others have been held inferior. Martin Luther made such a distinction within the Canon. He found a gospel within the gospel, and judged the books of the New Testament according to their witness to Christ. His selection of some New Testament books which reveal Christ and teach what is needful and blessed to know, and his relegation of other books to a lower realm as inferior, was based on his anterior conception of what constituted the gospel. Thus Luther, in judging the *sources* of Christian doctrine, also passed judgment on Christian doctrine itself.

Inevitably any Christian will find that parts of the New Testament speak to him more plainly than others; that some portions represent and preach Christ more clearly than others; that some books seem to be the epitome of the gospel, while others deal with secondary considerations. And it is this fact which, among others, accounts for the differences to be found among various theological statements and points of view. But such a judgment should not be made an article of faith to be imposed on the Church as a whole. Any such judgment must inevitably be in part subjective. Luther, to be sure, appealed to external standards when he stated that such

books as Hebrews, James and the Apocalypse were not truly and certainly "capital books" of the New Testament. He doubted that any one of them had been written by an apostle; and historical criticism has tended to bear him out. But many historical critics are also of the opinion that the Fourth Gospel was not written by an "apostle" either, the Gospel which Luther cherished above all. Yet historical tests were not decisive for Luther; for he also wrote that no book which did not teach Christ was apostolic, even if it had been written by an apostle; and any book which preaches Christ is apostolic "even if Judas, Annas, Pilate, and Herod preached it."⁶ Luther's final test was not historical, but subjective and personal. He asked, does this book teach and preach Christ to me?

That a Christian should ask such a question of Biblical books is altogether natural and right. Luther cannot be judged for having asked this question. But the Church cannot accept either his judgment or that of any Christian as to which books preach Christ, when throughout the centuries different books have validated themselves to different Christians as peculiarly authentic. It would be an error to absolutize the judgment of any theologian, or even of any group of Christians, as to which books in the New Testament Canon preach Christ. The Bible is first of all the Church's book before it is my book, or any one else's book; and there is always a tension between the Bible as the Church's book and the Bible as my book. While it is true that only those parts of the New Testament which authenticate themselves to me as true can be authoritative for me; it is also true that the whole of the Bible is normative for the whole of the Church in whose context alone I can understand it. Tension arises out of the fact that a part of the New Testament validates itself to me, while the whole of

6. *Ibid.*, 450. Quoted from Luther's *Werke*, ed. Walch, XIV 150.

the New Testament is normative for the Christian community to which I belong and from which I have received the gospel. I must always, therefore, re-approach the whole New Testament in the attempt to broaden my understanding of the gospel which the Church preaches as apostolic.

Every man builds his own theology on the basis of his understanding of scripture, and differences in theology are to be accounted for on the basis of differences in understanding of the Bible. But no theologian can stand in absolute judgment of scripture because of his particular response to it; for it is scripture which stands in judgment of every theologian, and must continue to do so if the Church is to remain the Church. The Bible cannot be clipped to fit any theology. Peeling off of layers has been tried before—from Marcion on down through the centuries; but the gospel in its fullness will not be cut down. It is still preached, and will be preached. By the grace of God we have recorded in the New Testament a diversity of response to the Word of God Incarnate. The New Testament does not present us with one, clear-cut, unambiguous point of view. It is rather a cluster of many precious jewels, no one of which one dare remove, least of all that stone which most severely judges him.

The Canon, however, can be accepted only in faith. It is a collection of apostolic writings which in faith are self-validating, and many come from east and west to take from it treasures new and old. That some parts of it should speak with clearer voice than other parts has always been true, and will continue to be true. But no man's response to it can be finally authoritative except for that man. Each must read with his own eyes and hear with his own ears and receive for himself what God will say to him.

IV

Yet the Canon is not authoritative in a

magical sense. It is not inconceivable that it should have been different from what it is. The New Testament, for example, might well have contained twenty-four or twenty-five, twenty-nine or thirty books instead of twenty-seven. And the books which make up our Bible are not in themselves holy things. They are not holy and they are not authoritative until they come alive. It is *God's Word* which is holy and authoritative; and God's Word does not lie on a shelf, and is not dusted when the house is cleaned. When the Bible is read or preached, an event takes place to which one must respond. When this event occurs the words of scripture convey the Word of God, and it is this Word which, coming alive, is authoritative. But the Word of God does not come alive, does not appear, is not heard, except in a dialogue. The words of the Bible remain dead unless one converse with them. One must come to the Bible with a question if he is to hear the Word of God. He may come boasting and ask for justification; or he may come anxious and ask for guidance; or he may come beseeching and ask a blessing. But whatever one's question, one must come with one's whole life and his whole self and be prepared to bring all his faculties into a dialogue.

The preacher must also hold a dialogue with scripture. Exposition is always done from man's side, and never from God's side. And if the congregation is to profit by the sermon, it must engage in this dialogue with the preacher. But whatever the dialogue, and wherever it is carried on, it is only when a dialogue is held with the Bible that its words, otherwise dead, come alive and confront one with the holy Word of God.

Something further must now be said about the way in which the Word of God is related to the words of scripture. It is clear that God's Word is mediated through words of men; and that we cannot know the Word of God except through the words of

witnesses who recorded it. We confront here a paradoxical situation. On the one hand, the words of scripture cannot be equated with the Word of God; but on the other hand, it is primarily and uniquely through the words of scripture that we know the Word of God. Orthodoxy has tended to make too small a distinction between the Word of God and the words of scripture; liberalism has tended to make too great a distinction between the Word of God and the words of scripture. At both extremes the meaning of scripture is limited: in orthodoxy by a literalism which crushes out the possibility of fresh insight; in liberalism by the removal of "layers" of scripture to the point where, on occasion, what has remained has been little more than a vapor. But both extremes are in error. On the one hand, the Word of God cannot be completely abstracted and separated from the words of scripture.⁷ The Word of God does not come to me unmediated. Dr. Albert Peel in an essay on "Protestant Views of the Authority of the Bible" quotes R. W. Dale as saying: "Practically the Bible does not come between me and God . . . The book—explain it how we may—vanishes. The truth read there shines in its own light."⁸ This view is intriguing, and one has a certain sympathy with it; but it does not solve the problem of the authority of scripture as Dale appears to assume. Because, however much one may feel that the book vanishes, in point of fact

so long as one is reading it, the book does not vanish. And however much one may forget the authors whose works he is reading—as Dale says he does—he is still reading words which have sifted through or been created in the minds of particular men. To hear the Word of God in scripture is not *just* to hear the Word of God; it is also to hear scripture. This is inevitable.

We must not, then, identify revelation with the medium which has received and recorded it; and those who witnessed and recorded the revelation were not themselves equal in authority to the Revealer. Not even St. Paul was infallible, as he himself was quite aware. The Biblical record, therefore, reflects different degrees as well as different kinds of comprehension and understanding. Not all Biblical writings are on the same level of insight, nor do they all say the same thing. While revelation depends on what God reveals, it is meaningless apart from what man understands. And man's comprehension depends on two factors: the gifts which God has given, and the use which one has made of such gifts up to the point of the revelation. There is, then, a contingent element involved in the reception of revelation, derived from varieties of gifts and from human freedom; and this element is reflected in the New Testament.

But granted the element of contingency involved, the situation still remains that we cannot hear the gospel except as it has been mediated to us by the apostles. One who has never seen or heard of the Bible, or of any literature dependent on the Bible, could hardly expound the Word of God as known in Jesus Christ. Who but a reader of the Bible could ever know that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us and that on the third day he was raised from the dead? This Word of God is communicated to us only through scripture and exposition of scripture. I can, of course, commune with God apart from reading

7. This is not intended to imply that God's Word is not and never has been communicated by any medium other than the Bible. We cannot, I think, deny revelation outside of scripture. Israel herself assimilated religious thinking and practices of an extra-Israelite origin; and the early Church adopted thought forms of the Hellenistic world. The very content of the Bible, then, presupposes not only the possibility but the actuality of revelation outside of the Church; and we cannot any longer make the clear-cut distinctions between "Greek" and "Hebraic" thought that have been made in the past. What is intended in the above statement is that the Word of God as recorded in the Bible must be normative in the Church for all saving knowledge communicated outside of the Church.

8. *The Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. C. W. Dugmore, p. 72.

scripture; but I know the God with whom I commune only because I have read scripture.

Another factor involved here which there is not time to develop but which must at least be mentioned, concerns the mythological framework in which the New Testament *kerygma* is set, as well as the mythological character of a great deal of the content of the New Testament. If it is true that only the language of myth can convey the content of myth and that a myth and its object become united to the point that what the myth says cannot be precisely said in any other language, then from this point of view also the Word of God as recorded in the New Testament is ultimately inseparable from the language of the New Testament.

Futhermore, I cannot get behind scripture to God as He is revealed in Jesus Christ. I can know God through Jesus Christ only from *this* side of the Bible. The theologian, then, must engage in exegesis. It is not the function of the theologian, or of any Christian, to push behind scripture and there, in some higher atmosphere, make contact with the revelation to which scripture bears witness. One cannot get behind the Bible to the revelation witnessed to in the Bible; one can only believe in the revelation as he lets the Bible speak to him of it. The final and authoritative Word of God is mediated through words of the Bible and cannot be heard except through those words.

But on the other side of the paradox it is equally true that the words of the Bible cannot be equated with the Word of God; for the Word of God in the Bible is the thought, intention or will of God, revealed finally in a Person, Jesus Christ. It is not a means of communicating thought through vibrations of the vocal chords. To accept the Bible as the *words* of God would not be to understand either revelation or God

as the Bible understands them. Moreover, so to understand the Bible as God's words would be to involve God in contradictions, in scientific and historical errors, not to mention occasional bad grammar. Such a God simply could not be worshipped and the authority of the Bible would be completely undermined. To understand the words of the Bible as the Word of God leaves one in an intolerable situation when his own experience points to one conclusion while his external authority leads to another. To affirm one's experience one must deny his authority; to affirm one's authority one must move in an imaginary world which God has not created and where His voice is not heard. The Bible is then not allowed to speak, in the interests of a theory about it. And it is quite clear that in the early Church the exact words in which the tradition was formulated were handled with considerable freedom. (For demonstration of this consult any harmony of the synoptic gospels.) The writers of the Gospels certainly did not believe that the words they used were identical with God's Word; nor did any New Testament author. "Thus saith the Lord" can never simply mean, "Thus do I write with pen and ink!"

But if it be true that the Biblical authors are not themselves revealers, but are rather the recorders of revelation; is it not the case that in Christ we confront a quite different situation? For Christ was not a recorder of revelation, but was the Revealer of God Himself. Then are not the words of Christ in a somewhat different category from the words of those who witnessed to Christ? In other words, if we cannot take any other words of scripture as revelation, must we not at least so understand the words which are recorded as spoken by Jesus?

To answer this question involves us, in the first place, in a critical problem, a problem which arises as a result of historical

investigations. There is not complete agreement in the Gospels as to just what Jesus said. It is generally assumed by modern critics that the Fourth Gospel cannot as a rule be held to contain Jesus' actual words. And when one compares Matthew, Mark and Luke one finds many discrepancies in the words which Jesus is recorded to have spoken. For example, all three of these Gospels record Peter's confession of Jesus' Messiahship at Caesarea Philippi, but only Matthew records that Jesus replied to Peter, "Thou art Peter, and on this rock I will build my church." Aside from the meaning of these famous words, which is by no means clear, the further question remains as to whether Jesus said them at all. Aside from the occurrence in this passage of the Greek word *ekklesia* which causes some difficulty there is the additional fact that neither Mark nor Luke seems to have known the words at all. Many other examples could be given. The situation is that Jesus' exact words cannot be determined with any finality. Historical and literary criticism can detect but cannot reconcile the differences; and on the basis of evidence now available, in many instances precisely what Jesus said simply cannot be known with assurance.

In the second place, we have Jesus' words recorded only in translation. If Jesus knew the Greek language at all—and there is no evidence either that he did or that he did not—the probability is that he taught his disciples in Aramaic. If this *was* the language which he used, then we know his teachings only in translation—translation from a Semitic to an Indo-European language. Exact meanings are frequently difficult or impossible to recapture in translating from one Indo-European language to another where the root words are often the same. But the problem is greatly increased in translating from a non-Indo-European to an Indo-European language.

This means that even if the Gospels agreed in their accounts of Jesus' words, which they do not, we would still have reason to question whether or not Jesus' intention had been accurately recorded.

Finally, there is a third difficulty. There are a few words in the Gospels accorded to Jesus, which are simply not true. For example: In Mark 13 Jesus is quoted as referring to wars, earthquakes, famines, the darkening of the sun and moon, the stars falling from heaven, the Son of man coming in clouds, and the gathering of the elect. And Jesus concludes: "Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away before all these things take place." But even the most ingenious believer cannot show that anything resembling these events took place before the generation of Jesus had passed away. There are four possibilities open to the exegete of this passage: either Jesus was here in error, or he never said these words at all, or he said them but they do not mean what they say, or his words were misunderstood and do not faithfully report his meaning. But in any case—unless one accepts the third possibility, which leads to totally irresponsible exegesis—it cannot be held that Jesus' words as we have them in the Gospels are infallible. To say that Jesus' words are infallible would have to mean not his words as we possess them, but a selection from them, or most of them, but not all of them. Or it would have to mean that Jesus' words do not mean what Jesus meant to say, in which case we would have to admit that we could never know what Jesus' intention had been; and the infallibility of an enigma is not much help. If we made a selection of Jesus' words which we held to be infallible, we would not be accepting a word of Jesus as authoritative because it is reported as a word of Jesus, but because it commends itself to us as a word of Jesus—the criterion thus becoming not the Gospel

record, but our own subjective judgment.

To return, then, to the question which we asked: If we cannot accept any other scriptural words as infallible, must we not at least accept Jesus' words as such? The answer must be No, simply because we cannot know exactly what Jesus said and because some words which are attributed to him are in error.

In conclusion let us repeat that the Word of God must be authoritative in the Church, the Word of God to which the Bible bears witness. This is a living Word, inseparable from the Bible but never to be identified with the Bible. The question as to the nature of the authority of the Bible cannot be settled at any time with finality. This is a question which the Church must always ask of herself, the answer to which will vary from age to age; for the answer must always be related to the results of historical inquiry, and to hermeneutical method. It is inconceivable, for example,

that the Church of the sixteenth century, reborn to a lively faith as it was, could possibly have determined the manner in which the Bible was to be considered authoritative in the twentieth century. If, in the providence of God, the great reformers had agreed in their understanding of the authority of scripture, their agreement would still have represented the mind only of the Church of their day, and could not have been binding on another day. And we cannot hope, we dare not presume to issue a final decree, valid for the ages. Biblical critics, theologians, and all Christians together, in conversations with each other, must ever seek new insight, relevant to their own day, into the mysterious way in which the dumb are led to speak, the maimed to be whole, the lame to walk, and the blind to see when they hear the Holy Word and can do no other than glorify the God of Israel and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

CONVOCATION WEEK—50th ANNIVERSARY!

By PRESIDENT FREDERICK W. WHITTAKER

Bangor Theological Seminary will celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of its Convocation Week on January 31, February 1, and 2, 1955. A program of lectures by four of the nation's outstanding Christian leaders will be presented in the Hammond Street Congregational Church beginning Monday afternoon and continuing through Wednesday evening. The annual Convocation luncheon meeting will be held on Tuesday noon and an added feature will be an informal tea and reception in the President's home on Wednesday afternoon.

The leader of the Beach Quiet Hour will be the Rev. Robert James McCracken, D.D., pastor of Riverside Church, New York City, since 1946. Dr. McCracken holds the M.A. and B.D. degrees of Glasgow University and has been granted honorary degrees by many universities including McMaster, Bucknell, Colgate, and Columbia. Before coming to his present position he served pastorates in Edinburgh and Glasgow, and was for eight years Professor of Christian Theology and Philosophy of Religion at McMaster University. He has been a lecturer on Practical Theology at Union Theological Seminary since 1949.

The Samuel Harris Lectures on Literature and Life will be given by Dr. D. Elton Trueblood, director of religious services for the United States Information Agency, Washington, D. C. Dr. Trueblood received his early education at Penn College and Brown University; he holds the S.T.B. degree of Harvard University and the Ph.D. degree of Johns Hopkins University. His honorary degrees include a Litt.D. from Washington and Lee University and an LL.D. from Miami University. Before as-

suming his important duties with the United States government early this year Dr. Trueblood served for eight years as Professor of Philosophy at Earlham College. From 1936 to 1945 he was Professor of the Philosophy of Religion and Chaplain at Stanford University. Dr. Trueblood is a member of the Society of Friends.

The Rev. James William Fifield, Jr., D.D., minister of the First Congregational Church of Los Angeles, California, since 1935, will deliver the George Shepard Lectures on Preaching. Dr. Fifield holds the A.B. degree of Oberlin College and the M.A. degree of the University of Chicago. He is also a graduate of the Chicago Theological Seminary with the B.D. degree and was honored by this institution with the degree of Doctor of Divinity. For eleven years Dr. Fifield was pastor of the East Congregational Church, Grand Rapids, Michigan; earlier he served churches in Illinois and South Dakota. He is the founder and director of Spiritual Mobilization, a trustee of the Pacific School of Religion, and a lecturer at the School of Religion of the University of Southern California.

The Enoch Pond Lectures on Applied Christianity will be delivered by the Rev. G. Bromley Oxnam, D.D., LL.D., Bishop of the Washington Area of the Methodist Church. Bishop Oxnam returns for his third appearance as a Convocation Week lecturer. He is a graduate of the University of Southern California with the A.B. degree and holds the S.T.B. degree of Boston University. Many institutions have awarded him honorary degrees including Wesleyan University, DePauw University,

and Yale University. Before assuming his present position Dr. Oxnam served the Methodist Church as Bishop of the Omaha, Boston, and New York Areas. Earlier he was Professor of Social Ethics at the University of Southern California, Professor of Practical Theology at Boston University School of Theology, and President of DePauw University. He has been a key figure in the work of the Federal Council, the National Council, and the World Council of Churches.

All four men have achieved national and international fame as lecturers, teachers, and authors. Their presence together at Bangor will mark a high point in the history of American convocations, and this is

proper since Bangor Theological Seminary originated this type of program in 1905 and is the first institution of its kind to celebrate such a semi-centennial. The idea of Convocation Week was conceived by President David Nelson Beach and Rev. Charles Harbutt, Superintendent of the Congregational Conference of Maine. In 1905 the lecturers were Rev. Robert Allen Hume, D.D., Enoch Pond Lectures on Applied Christianity; Rev. Charles Edward Jefferson, D.D., LL.D., George Shepard Lectures on Preaching; Rev. Gaius Glenn Atkins, D.D., L.H.D., Samuel Harris Lectures on Literature and Life. The Leaders of the Quiet Hour were members of the local clergy.

SEMINARY OPENS FOR 139th YEAR

By VICE-PRESIDENT DANIEL W. FENNER

On the evening of September 21st a most impressive service marked the beginning of a new year in Bangor Seminary's history. Filled to overflowing, the chapel building was sorely pressed to accommodate the new students (42), the old students (48) and friends of the Seminary.

After giving the prayer of invocation Dr. Whittaker introduced Dr. Willard Bass, chairman of the Board of Trustees, who first recognized the new trustees present: Mr. James U. Crockett of Concord, Mass., Mr. James A. Gannett of Orono, Maine, and Mr. Ellison F. Beckwith of Lexington, Mass.

Dr. Bass then inducted the Rev. Mervin Monroe Deems, Ph.D., as Dean of the Seminary and Professor of Christian History with the following remarks:

"Among my firm and cherished convictions is a belief in the lasting influence of personality. Of course what a man says is important and what he does is still more important, but both the words and the deeds are the expression of what he is. People have a way of looking through and behind the words and the deeds and sizing up the man himself. In the end the impact of a man upon his community, his friends, his family has its source in his character and is the reflection of his personality. Character is then a prime qualification of those who would lead others as teachers, or pastors.

"With this conviction I find my present duty of inducting Dr. Deems into office a most pleasant one,—for two reasons. In the first place, his acceptance of the office

of Dean will relieve President Whittaker of much detailed work, thereby giving him time for more teaching and more opportunity to make effective use of his own personality. In the second place, the coming of Dr. Deems brings into the Seminary a man of vigorous personality; a man already known and loved by many here; a man of scholarship, ideals and character whose presence with us promises greatly to enrich the life of the Seminary.

"Mervin Monroe Deems:

"The Trustees of Bangor Theological Seminary have unanimously elected you Dean of the Seminary and Professor of Christian History. These offices carry no symbols with which to invest you, but they do carry definite duties and opportunities.

"As Dean of the Seminary you will be friend, guide and counsellor of students preparing for the Christian ministry. It is your duty and privilege to help them to choose wisely, to work earnestly to gain the academic training and the spiritual in-

sight which will fit them to be effective ministers of Christ, and wise and sympathetic counsellors of their parishioners.

"As Professor of Christian History you will continue the work you formerly did at Bangor, so gratefully remembered by many alumni. With broadened experience and deeper insight you can help your students see the course of the Christian church through the centuries in due perspective, and help them so to organize the experience of the past that it will clarify and illumine the problems of the present.

"By virtue of the authority vested in me by the Board of Trustees, I pronounce you Dean of Bangor Theological Seminary and Professor of Christian History. God grant you wisdom, grace and usefulness in the service of His Kingdom."

Dr. Throckmorton's address was then given in a lively, scholarly manner, after which the service closed with prayer and benediction by Dr. Deems. A reception in the gymnasium concluded the evening's activities.

ALUMNI NOTES

'99—William F. Slade, Ph.D., retired from the active ministry during the past summer. He is now Pastor Emeritus of the Evangelical Congregational Church in Tyngsboro, Mass. (*Address: 73 Hornbeam Hill Road, Chelmsford, Mass.*)

'10—James Alcock for seven years (1947-54) pastor of the Chapin Memorial Universalist Church of Oneonta, N. Y., has resigned in order to serve as pastor of the Church of the Messiah, Universalist, in Fort Plain. (*Address: Church of the Messiah, Fort Plain, N. Y.*)

'28—After a pastorate of six years (1948-54) in the Second Congregational Church of Bennington, Vermont, Hugh A. Gillis has accepted a call to the Congregational Church of East Weymouth, Mass., where he began his duties on September 5, 1954. (*Address: Congregational Church, East Weymouth, Mass.*)

'31—Everett W. Gould, pastor of the Congregational Church, Castalia, Ohio, from 1948 to 1954, is now in Willowick, Ohio. (*Address: 348 East 307th St., Willowick, Ohio.*)

'32—G. Rowell Crocker, formerly Rector of St. Martin's Church in New Bedford, Mass., is now Rector of Immanuel Episcopal Church in Ansonia. (*Address: 45 Jackson St., Ansonia, Conn.*)

'52—Richard K. Bailey has resigned from the Union Church in Kenduskeag, Maine, where he has been pastor since June, 1948, and has become pastor of the First Congregational Church in Hadley, Mass., beginning his work there on July 1, 1954. Mr. Bailey received the Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Maine in June, 1954. (*Address: Hadley, Mass.*)

ex-'52—Edwin C. Burlingame, pastor of the Union Church in Gregory, S. D., 1953-54, is now serving the Congregational Church in Red Cloud. (*Address: Congregational Church, Red Cloud, Nebraska.*)

BIRTHS

Congratulations to:

'33 and '34—Gretchen and Carl Hall on the birth of a son, William Douglas, on August 13, 1954 (*Address: North St., Norfolk, Mass.*)

'46—Donna and John Alexander on the birth of a daughter, Margaret Jane, on August 20, 1954. (*Address: 1810 North Mulligan Ave., Chicago 39, Ill.*)

ORDINATIONS

'54—David E. Wigley was ordained to the Christian ministry in Puritan Congregational Church, Scranton, Pa., on August 22, 1954. The sermon was preached by Rev. James S. Henry, '17. Other parts were taken by Rev. Frank Pascoe, Prof. E. J. Lewis, Rev. E. H. Green, Rev. W. J. Hill. (*Address: Solon, Maine.*)

ex-'54—Harold Field Worthley, son of the Rev. Herbert M. Worthley, '27, was ordained to the Christian ministry in the Congregational Church of Roslindale, Mass., June 1, 1954. The sermon was preached by Dr. Charles Gordon Cumming and other parts were taken by the Revs. Roy J. Davison, '53, Mina Alicia Corea, Archibald Kerr, Herbert M. Worthley, '27, Blair Benner, Levering Reynolds, Jr., George H. Williams, W. Arthur Rice, '41, Everett R. Barrows. (*Address: P. O. Box 15, Wilton, N. H.*)

OBITUARIES

'06—Albert Llewellyn Hill died on July 20, 1954, shortly after resuming his summer residence in Goodwin's Mills, Maine. He was born in Lyman, Maine, Jan. 10, 1867, and was ordained in the Advent Christian Church, Eliot, Maine, Jan. 5, 1893. In 1889 he graduated from Gorham Normal School, and from Dartmouth College, A.B., in 1909. He served as pastor of the Advent Christian Church in South Eliot, Maine, 1892-94; Farmington, N. H., 1894-97; New Bedford, Mass., 1897-99; Lyman, Maine, 1899-1902; Bangor, Maine, 1902-07; and of the Congregational Church in Enfield, N. H., 1907-11; Hinsdale, N. H., 1911-17; Wells, Me., 1917-20; and Wilton, N. H., 1920-34, when he retired from the active ministry. Mr. Hill was with the Pilgrim Memorial Fund for the year 1919-20. He served as delegate to the General Council in Seattle, Washington, in 1931 and to the International Congregational Council in Bourne-mouth, England, in 1934.

Surviving are his widow, Florence Hamilton Hill, three daughters, Ada, Gladys, and Winifred, and one brother, Virgil H. Hill.

ex-09—Harry Stratton Martin, Congregational Christian educator and agricultural missionary in China for over thirty years, died at Brookfield Center, Conn., May 15, 1954.

Born in Spring Valley, Wisconsin, August 16, 1877, Mr. Martin graduated from Carleton College, 1903, attended Bangor Theological Seminary, 1907-08, and received the M.A. degree from Yale University, 1909. Mr. Martin was ordained to the Christian ministry at Brookfield, Conn., June 11, 1908, and served as pastor of the Congregational Church of Brookfield for two years, 1908-10. In 1910 Mr. Martin went to China as a foreign missionary under the auspices of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. He served as principal of Yu Ying Academy, North China Mission, Peking from 1910-18, and as principal of Jefferson Academy, Tunghsien, Peking, from 1918 to 1934,

when he returned home on the repatriation ship, *M. S. Gripsholm*. Mr. Martin was a member and missionary emeritus of the Broadway Tabernacle Church in New York City, associate member of the Congregational Church, Brookfield Center, Conn., and in 1945 he and Mrs. Martin were made missionaries emeriti of the American Board. He is survived by his widow, Mrs. Rose Lombard Martin, two sons, Lyman L. Martin and H. Stratton Martin, and two daughters, Mrs. Maurice D. Triouleyre and Ruth F. Martin.

B. T. S. MEN AT THE WORLD COUNCIL IN EVANSTON

The following Bangor men were in attendance at the conference of the World Council in Evanston this past summer:

Robert S. Balfe, '47
John W. MacNeil, '39
Elwood S. Poore, '53
Robert P. Seater, ex-'55
Dr. Leonard M. Sizer
Dr. Burton H. Throckmorton, Jr.

TRUSTEE HONORED

Rev. Rodney W. Roundy, D.D., Superintendent Emeritus of the Congregational Christian Conference of Maine, celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of his ordination on July 25, 1954, in the United Church of Ludlow, Vermont. Dr. Roundy has served as trustee of Bangor Theological Seminary since 1935. Our sincere congratulations to him as another significant milestone is reached in his great service to the Christian Church. (Address: 257 Vaughan St., Portland 4, Maine.)

